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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the value of religion in developing a school community capable of forming social capital. Research included a multiple case study approach involving a Catholic school, a non-Catholic religious school, and a public school within the same geographic area. Data collection involved: school documents (parent-student handbooks, registration materials, school newsletters, parent organization minutes, and school calendars); interviews with key informants (principal, principal's secretary, active parents, and community members); faculty interviews or focus groups; parent surveys and focus groups; aggregate student achievement scores; and observer notes from several activities involving parents. Social capital existed in each of the schools, but the relative amounts of social capital as measured by parent interaction, the number of other school families parents knew, and how often parents volunteered at the school, varied by school context. Religiously-sponsored schools had higher levels of social capital. This was due to several characteristics of religious school communities. For example, religion offered a common bond for building community and a time and place for sustained regular social interaction, resulting in social networks that the schools could use for their own purposes. (SM)

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The Value of Religion in Uniting a School Community Capable of Forming Social Capital

Introduction

The value of religion to the educational process in the United States has often been understudied and therefore underreported. Although there is extensive research that deals with education and social factors such as race, gender, and class, there is relatively little research into the relationship between religion and education. This is true despite indication from some (Coleman & Hoffer, 1987; Greeley, 1982; Wehlage, Smith, Leski, & Fernandez, 1989) that religiously-sponsored schools are often more successful academically than public schools, even with at-risk students in urban schools. The reasons for this lack of research in religion and education range from a general bias in the academy from studying religious matters as described by Marsden (1994, 1997) to the pragmatic, as researchers who want their work published stay clear of the fray which surrounds the controversial issue of separation of church and state. Whatever their reasons, educational researchers who have ignored research in religion and education have avoided a potentially significant and fruitful arena of research.

The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate the value of religion in the development of a school community that is capable of forming social capital. The research which forms the empirical basis for this paper is part of a larger study of the organizational structures and processes that contribute to the formation and maintenance of social capital within a school community. This study found that there were significant differences in social capital formation between the public and religiously-sponsored schools that were

studied. Religion provided the religiously-sponsored schools a set of values and norms from which a community could coalesce, and as members of religious communities met face-to-face frequently, they developed social networks capable of forming social capital.

Perspective

The theoretical framework for this paper came from the concept of social capital as defined by James S. Coleman (1988). Coleman described social capital as the resources available to an individual that results from their interaction within a social network. Social capital, according to Coleman, exists in the form of trust, information sharing, and norms with effective sanctions. The social network in which the social capital resides can be as small as a family or as large as a community.

Social capital is different from other forms of capital in that the resources of social capital are available only to individuals while they interact within a social network and are not the personal possession of individuals. When individuals withdraw from a particular social network, they lose their ability to utilize the social capital of that social network, but are then free to join others where they could again enjoy the resources of social capital. All of this is quite different than other forms of capital such as economic, human and cultural capital which are conceived to be owned by individuals.

Economic capital is the most familiar form of capital and it refers to the financial wealth of an individual. The wealth of an individual consists of the property, cash and investments owned by an individual that can be expressed in terms of money. The economic wealth of an individual is usually demonstrated by records that attest to ownership and quantify the amount.

Somewhat less tangible is the concept of human capital as developed by Shultz (1961). He described human capital as the skills, training, experience, and education that individuals possess. These individual differences in human capital differentiates workers and those with higher human capital are potentially more valuable to their employers. Human capital is often expressed in terms of credentials and records of experience and education.

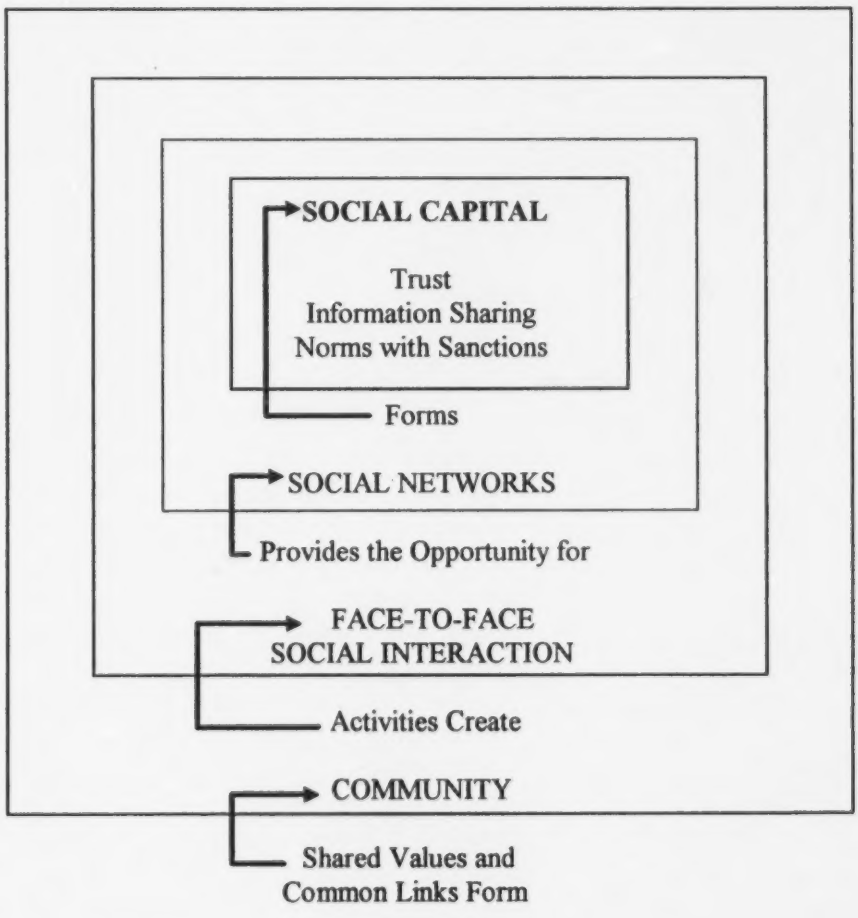
Also less tangible is the concept of cultural capital theorized by Bourdieu (Mahar, Harker, & Wilkes, 1990). Although Bourdieu defined cultural capital to include academic credentials, he extended his definition to include what he called "habitus". Habitus referred to the language, perception and style that bonded members of particular cultural groups together and separated those of different socioeconomic classes. Although differences in cultural capital can be recognized, what distinguishes levels of cultural capital is often implicit and subtle.

The "true" wealth of an individual when considered more broadly includes not only the economic capital he or she possesses, but also the human, cultural and social capital as well. The degree these other forms of capital are present often determines the success of an individual as one form of capital can be converted to another. This is seen as university students exchange some of their economic resources for an education, increasing their human capital. This increased human capital may enable an individual to gain new employment which increases his or her economic capital. Thus, each of the forms of capital is a resource utilized by the individual and part of his or her "true" wealth.

It is important to recognize the social nature of social capital. It is both formed and utilized by the individuals who interact face-to-face within a social network. It is a

result of this face-to-face interaction within a social network that trust is formed, information is shared, and norms are enforced that are forms of social capital recognized by Coleman. This social interaction which results in social capital takes place as a consequence of community activities. And these community activities are an expression of a community united by shared values and common links. Thus social capital forms within social networks which results from community activities. This is illustrated by Figure 1 which should be read from the bottom up.

Figure 1



The importance of community in the formation of social capital was noted by Coleman and Hoffer (1987) who saw that it was most likely to develop within what they called a functional community. The described a functional community, just as its name implies, as a community which functions. It is a community where its members are united by shared values and common links, a community with intergenerational contact that allows for the enforcement of norms established by the adults of the community, a community where there is "closure" between the adults and children (where parents know their children's friends and the parents of their children's friends), and a community where its members interact frequently face-to-face.

In the United States, functional communities were typical in most geographical neighborhoods in the past, but they are now primarily found in rural areas or in dense ethnic neighborhoods of urban areas. The functional communities of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were united and maintained by the dominant religions and cultural orientations. However, as institutional, technological, and structural changes have occurred in society, these communities have diminished. They have diminished as a result of the decreased influence of religion in our culture, as the separation of residence and work has decreased adult interaction among neighbors, as increased affluence has reduced the interdependency of families, and as community interaction has been replaced by individuals joining special interest groups (Coleman & Hoffer, 1987; Putnam, 1995).

Although few functional communities continue to exist as geographical communities, functional communities can exist where people are united for reasons other than geographical proximity. This is often true in the case of religious communities where

a common ideology unites people with shared values. As members of a religious community meet regularly to worship and express their common faith, there is much opportunity for face-to-face interaction. One product of this face-to-face interaction is that people come to know each other. And as people get to know each other, they learn to trust each other, share information, and feel comfortable enforcing the norms of the community. These are all manifestations of social capital that is developed within a functional community.

Private schools that are part of a religious community or draw from several religious communities utilize the social capital found within these religious communities to benefit their students. Coleman and Hoffer, in their study Public and Private Schools (1987) attributed the higher student achievement they found in Catholic and other religiously-sponsored schools to the social capital resources these schools enjoyed as part of a functional community. However, a weakness of this study was that they assumed that parent interaction was greater in religious schools, but they provided little empirical evidence to support this assertion.

This research was conducted to investigate parent interaction in public and religiously-sponsored private schools to see if the empirical evidence gathered could support this assertion.

Methodology

A multiple case study approach was chosen consisting of a Catholic school, a non-Catholic religious school, and a public school. This approach was selected as it gave several contexts in which to observe the phenomena of social capital formation. This

allowed the structures and processes that form social capital in each context to be compared so that similarities and differences between the schools could be noted.

The two religiously-sponsored schools were chosen as the research by Coleman and Hoffer (1987) suggested that they generally maintained high levels of social capital. The study of a large public school was chosen for contrast. Thus, the use of private versus public, religious versus non-religious, Catholic versus non-Catholic, and large versus small distinctions assisted in teasing out those structures and processes common to social capital formation in all schools from those that are particular to a specific type of school, size, or ideology.

All three schools were from the same geographical area in order to help control for socioeconomic status and for social capital produced by community-wide programs independent of the schools. Although the two private schools drew students from some distance away, most students from all three schools came from the communities immediately surrounding the schools.

Since the theoretical framework for this study was adopted from Coleman and Hoffer (1987) who studied high schools, each school site selected for this study was a high school or contained the secondary grades. It is thought that the secondary grades may be more sensitive to social capital formation as it has been found in the literature that parent involvement at school generally decreases with the increasing age of the student.

Data Sources and Analysis

Multiple sources of data were utilized including school documents, interviews with key informants (principal, principal's secretary, active parents, community members), faculty interviews or focus groups, parent surveys and focus groups, aggregate student

achievement scores, and observer notes. Documents included parent-student handbooks, registration materials, school newsletters, parent organization minutes, and school calendars. The parent survey was sent to all parents in schools of less than 300 families and to a random sample of 300 in the large public school. Observer notes were taken by the researcher at several activities that involved parents, including sports events, booster club meetings, parent organization meetings, back-to-school night, and graduation.

To aid in analysis of the qualitative data, all interviews and focus group sessions were transcribed. These data were combined with observer notes and analyzed with the use of qualitative software called ATLAS.ti 4.1. The computer software facilitated the process of coding and sorting the data into categories. Emerging categories, as well as those representing the three major forms of social capital—trust, information sharing, and norms with sanctions—were utilized.

The quantitative data from the parent and faculty surveys were analyzed with the use of SPSS 8.0 for Windows. The frequency and percent of response for each question was tabulated for each school.

The results of the qualitative and quantitative aspects of this study were summarized for each case separately and were submitted to key informants as a member check for agreement or disagreement.

Important to this study was the determination of how the schools differed in their ability to form social capital. This was somewhat difficult as unlike economic capital, no records are kept of who "owns" what, and unlike human capital, there are no credentials that give evidence of education achieved or experience gained. However, this is not

unlike other important concepts in life such as love, truth, beauty, and courage which, although they cannot be measured directly, are approximated with the use of a proxy.

One proxy for social capital formation is the measure of face-to-face interaction. According to theory, social capital forms within networks as people interact face-to-face. Therefore, it would be expected that there would be more social capital where there is more social interaction and less social capital where there is less social interaction.

Schools

In order to better facilitate the cross-case analysis, each school site is described with particular attention given to its physical description, faculty, parents, and the characteristics of the community in which the school was embedded. This is followed by the cross-case analysis of the proxies of social capital.

St. Mark's Catholic High School

St. Mark's was a co-ed Catholic high school of 320 students. It was situated on a 27-acre campus in a residential neighborhood of a medium-sized (population 200,000) city. The school buildings were approximately 45 years old and showed their age due to extensive use, deferred maintenance, and recent weather damage. The principal was a well-respected priest, and St. Mark's enjoyed the reputation of a school where each year, over 90% of the senior class went on to college.

The faculty at St. Mark's was predominantly Caucasian, and there were the same number of men and women. Most held only a bachelor's degree, while a few held a master's degree or higher. A few teachers held a state credential, but as a private school, St. Mark's did not require state teacher credentials. They ranged in experience from two

to twenty-eight years with an average of ten, but due to a large faculty turnover in recent years, they averaged only 5.5 years teaching at St. Mark's.

The parents who sent their children to St. Mark's were educated, as 93% had some college experience, including 56% who held bachelor's degrees, and 23% who held graduate degrees. Their average annual family income was $66,000, and 90% owned their own homes with most living within ten miles of the school. Most families (77%) were two-parent homes and although most were Caucasian (54%), there was a large segment who were Hispanic (30%) with the remainder African American or Asian.

Although families that were part of the St. Mark's community came from 17 different Catholic parishes and feeder schools, they were united in their desire to provide a genuinely Catholic education for their children. The centrality of the Catholic nature of the school community was evidenced by the fact that 86% of the students were Catholic. Families came to St. Mark's as small social networks from their respective parishes, but they were integrated into the larger school community through the sports program, volunteer work at the school, and through programs specifically designed by the school to integrate the parents and their students into the broader school community.

Green Valley North High School

Green Valley North High School (GVNHS) was a new, four-million dollar, high-tech, state-of-the-art public school of 2,800 students on a 58-acre campus. Although the campus was new, it was situated in an older, traditional community that was rich in history, culture, and had enjoyed a strong sense of community for many years.

The need for GVNHS had existed for over ten years, as the older, established Green Valley High School had slowly grown to one of the largest high schools in the

state. It was only through an intense campaign conducted by parents who were primarily school district employees that the fourth school bond election passed with enough votes to allow for the construction of the school.

The faculty at GVNHS was large, predominantly Caucasian (75%) and had slightly more women (58%) than men. Most (57%) held masters degrees, and the vast majority (92%) held state credentials for all subjects they taught. Their experience varied from a first year teacher to one of 35 years of experience, but the average was 14 years. As the school was new, no teacher had been at the school longer than two years. Most teachers (55%) lived within five miles of the school.

The parents who sent their children to GVNHS were well educated, as 85% had some college education including 58% who held bachelor's degrees and 29% who held graduate degrees. Their average annual family income was $69,000, and 81% owned their own homes. Most families (83%) were two-parent homes, and most school families were Caucasian (71%).

Although geographical boundaries defined the students who attended GVNHS, these boundaries in and of themselves did not create community. It was commonly reported in the interview data, however, that there was a strong sense of community spirit in the city of Green Valley. Included in this community spirit was a commitment to education.

Las Colinas Academy

Las Colinas Academy was a private, religious (Seventh-day Adventist) K-12 school serving the families of 328 students. The school was situated on 25 acres, nestled

against the foothills of a major mountain range. Most of the buildings were built in the 1970's and separate buildings housed the elementary, junior high, and high schools.

All of the faculty were required to be Seventh-day Adventists. The faculty was half male and half female with most (85%) identified as Caucasian. Most (53%) of the teachers held masters degrees, and most (58%) were credentialed by the state. The faculty ranged in experience from a first year teacher to one with 28 years experience, with an average of 13 years. Due to a large turnover in recent years, most teachers (68%) had been at the school less than five years.

A large majority (97%) of the parents who sent their children to Las Colinas Academy had some college education, including 83% who held bachelor's degrees and 35% who held graduate degrees. Commensurate with this high level of education, the parents had high annual family incomes, with the average at $75,000. Most parents (86%) owned their own homes and 95% were two-parent families. Most Las Colinas parents were Caucasian (91%) and many (74%) lived within ten miles of the school.

The Las Colinas Academy school community was a tight community united by their common faith. Most school families attended the largest constituent church (Vista Grande Seventh-day Adventist Church) that supported Las Colinas Academy. Parents, teachers, and students all generally knew each other from their interaction at church and in church activities. This closeness in the relationship between the church and school was seen in the fact that equipment, vehicles, and facilities were readily shared between the church and the school. In fact, it was often difficult to determine if youth-related activities were school or church sponsored, but making this distinction did not matter to the participants.

The descriptions of each case in this study revealed several similarities and differences which were associated with similarities and differences in social capital formation. Common to all three schools were parents who were middle class. This was important, as these middle class families were, by and large, college-educated and were interested in providing a good education for their children. Parents demonstrated this desire by making large tuition payments to the private schools, and by the provision of a new state-of-the-art public high school. However, this similarity was overshadowed by differences in social capital formation that can be seen to develop from the religious nature of the two private schools.

Results

According to the theoretical framework of this paper, social capital in the form of trust, information sharing, and norms with sanctions is created within social networks by people who interact face-to-face as a result of community activities within a community of those who are united by shared values and common links.

Social capital formation is dependent upon whether or not people interact face-to-face with each other with enough regularity to get to know each other. It is when people know each other that they can develop a sense of trust with each other, share information with each other, and feel comfortable enforcing community norms with other parents' children. Therefore, an important proxy for relative amounts of social capital present in a school community would be how often school people interact and how many know each other.

Two questions in the parent survey asked parents to respond regarding their interaction with other parents. One question asked, "How likely is it for you to meet other

school parents in the following situations?" The other question was similar but asked, "How likely is it that you would talk about the school with other parents at the following places?" Following these questions, there were sixteen situations listed ranging from school events to church and community activities. The "very likely" response was calculated for each school, ranked, and the top five for each school are listed in Table 1 and Table 2 below. What can be seen from this data was that parents were more likely to be involved in the religious private schools than the public school as demonstrated by the higher percentages. It was also found that the parents were more likely to participate and interact with each other at school events where their children were the focus of the event such as at sports events or students performances rather than at events where the focus was more adult-centered such as parent-teacher conferences or booster club meetings.

Table 1
Parent Interaction Ratings (percentages)

Question I. c. How likely is it for you to meet with other school parents in the following situation?						
	School					
Rank	St. Mark's		GVNHS		Las Colinas	
1	School sporting events	74	School sporting events	36	Student performances	68
2	Student performances	59	Student performances	30	School fund raising	47
3	School booster or other club meeting	50	School booster or other club meeting	29	School field trip	46
4	Parent teacher meeting	49	School fund raising	20	School sporting events	45
5	Parent teacher conference	47	Parent teacher conference	19	Church or church activity	40
Question I. d. How likely is it that you would talk about the school with other parents at the following places?						
	School					
Rank	St. Mark's		GVNHS		Las Colinas	
1	School sporting events	62	School sporting events	39	Office volunteer	54
2	School booster or other club meeting	55	School booster or other club meeting	39	Student performances	51
3	Parent teacher conference	53	Student performance	34	School fund raising	39
4	Parent teacher meeting	51	Parent teacher meetings	27	School sporting events	32
5	Student performance	44	Parent teacher conference	27	School field trip	30

The value of frequent parent interaction is that it allows parents to get to know each other well enough so that social capital can be formed. A question in the parent survey asked the parents to estimate the number of school families they knew. The data from this question is listed in Table 2 below. It is evident from the data that more parents knew other school families in the private schools than in the public school. The largest percentage of St. Mark's parents knew 6-10 families (31%), the largest percentage of GVNHS parents knew 1-5 families (46%), and the largest percentage of Las Colinas parents knew more than 20 families (86%). Furthermore, both private religious schools had higher percentages in the number of families known than the public school in each category beyond the first (1-5 families).

Table 2
Parents Know Other School Families (percentages)

Question III. 9. My best estimate of the number of school families I know is:			
	School		
Number of families	St. Mark's	GVNHS	Las Colinas
1-5	26	46	23
6-10	31	17	20
11-20	23	20	21
More than 20	20	17	36

Parent involvement in schools often takes the form of volunteering in the classroom, library, or office, or in fund raising activities. In this way, schools provide a place for parent participation and often provide an opportunity for social interaction between parents that is capable of forming social capital. However, schools differ in the space they provide for direct parent participation at school.

In this study, both private religious schools had twice as many (St. Mark's 84%, Las Colinas 83%) parents volunteer some (more than 40 hours a year) than the public

school (GVNHS 40%). This relative space for school volunteers can also be seen in the category that received the largest percentage for each school. The largest percentage for St. Mark's was 29%, which fell in the category for "more than 40 hours a year". The largest percentage for GVNHS was 59% for zero hours a year volunteer work. The largest percentage at Las Colinas was for 1-10 hours of volunteer work per year. The data for volunteering can be seen in Table 3.

Table 3
Parent Volunteering at School (percentages)

Question III. 8. How much time do you volunteer at school?			
	School		
Hours per year	St. Mark's	GVNHS	Las Colinas
0 hours	16	59	18
1-10 hours	23	25	39
11-20 hours	19	5	13
21-40 hours	13	5	11
More than 40 hours	29	5	20

The results seen in the survey data were also supported, to a large degree, by the qualitative data that was collected at each school site. Characteristic comments are provided from parents or faculty at each school to illustrate their thoughts regarding parents knowing each other, parent interaction, and volunteering at school.

St. Mark's

Many of the parents who sent their children to St. Mark's already knew each other from their church and church-sponsored schools. The principal's secretary said:

> I think a lot of them [parents] do know each other before they even get here through their parishes—and I think a lot of parents are really involved in their parishes...and then, it's a close community right here, and even new parents that come in—and a lot of [veteran] parents do go out of their way to make them feel that way.

A veteran faculty member commented on the same phenomenon. He explained it this way: "They'll know each other [parents] by their parish groups, and they'll come that way, but once they get here, all the parishes kind of work together."

A key to parent involvement at St. Mark's was student involvement. As it was a small school, it was relatively easy for students to find a place of involvement, and student involvement facilitated parent involvement. One parent spoke of this when she said:

> I'm new. Everything is new to me. I still feel distant from the school, and I live 20 miles round trip. My daughter—I can't seem to get her involved yet. Like everyone's in sports, and I want her to join something…I feel that if she was involved in something, I would have to be there for something and get involved more or meet some of the other parents, so I'm still getting my feet wet and I can't say I'm comfortable yet, 'cause I'm not.

Another parent responded, "That's true. If your child's not in sports, it's much harder to get involved as a parent."

Parents who were involved at school often formed friendships that extended beyond school activities. One parent stated, "We've made friends with a lot of people on the [sports] booster board. I mean good friends with them—where we go out [together] socially." One veteran teacher observed:

> All of the parents who come and do stuff for the school board hang together, and they established some really tight bonds. If you saw them at graduation in June, you know, there were tears in their eyes thinking they were never going to see each other. I'm talking about the parents, not the students. But I'll bet they still call each other and stay in touch.

There were many opportunities for involvement of parents at St. Mark's. One veteran teacher stated, "You'll see ten, twenty parents every day that are here just doing stuff." Another new teacher said:

> People are volunteering here constantly, you know. I mean there are parents on campus all of the time. Mrs. Leslie, she's out there doing gardening half the day.

She's probably out there now, and then she'll go over and she'll work in the snack bar. They [the parents] are around all the time. They're very active.

Green Valley North High School

Parents who were likely to know each other at GVNHS usually served with the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) or in the various booster clubs. One parent said, "We have a lot of parents working together through PTA and through booster clubs—a lot of booster clubs for athletic teams, and they form nice social groups outside of just what they do."

Since 88% of the Green Valley Unified School District employees lived in the city of Green Valley, it was not unusual for them to get involved as parents in school volunteer work. The ranking PTA board officer stated:

> PTA is my hobby. I'm a teacher also at an elementary school. I just enjoy education, all aspects of it, so I—my husband calls it nosy—but it's just an interest of mine, and I thought as my children have gone through, I have found that in order to know what's happening, I have got to—I had to make an effort to come on campus and get involved.

The value of parent involvement as a social capital resource was seen during a conversation in a parent focus group. The conversation went like this:

> Parent 1: I let my kids know if I'm not there, somebody I know will be there. I tell them every time, 'Oh, so and so saw you driving down the freeway, and they said you were a good driver.' See, I have my spies. I let them know that the community is there to report to me as well, not in a policeman sort of way, but for them to know they all care about you, and my kids have turned out great.
> Parent 2: It doesn't go back to that village thing, does it?
> Parent 1: I think it is so overused. But it's true.
> Parent 3: It's valid.
> Parent 2: It's trite because it's true.
> Parent 1: I know that group of parents, the kids that my son hangs out with. I mean, I'll lay into their kids if they'll lay into mine.
> Researcher: So you watch out for each other's...
> Parent 1: Definitely. And I do it more in a joking kind of way. 'Listen, this is your second mother talking. If I ever catch you...'

Parent 2: That's what my son used to say. He couldn't wait to leave for college because he had 43 sets of parents. And now when he comes home, he says, 'Oh, I'll have to check in with all those parents.' But the sad thing is that there are kids around here that don't have that at all. Not even the parent involvement, let alone the friends' parents' involvement. And those other kids sometimes just fall through the cracks.

Las Colinas

Significant to parent interaction at Las Colinas was that there was a close relationship between Las Colinas Academy and its largest constituent church, Vista Grande Seventh-day Adventist church. The youth pastor at Vista Grande SDA Church explained this relationship by saying:

> It's difficult to separate the church from the [school] parents. There's a lot of church support and there's a lot of parental support for what goes on at the school. I'm on campus quite a bit, in a lot of different ways. I do a bit of teaching here and there, sections of the Bible class, baptismal classes...I'm kind of on and off campus helping out with different kinds of things. So, there's kind of a mutual relationship back and forth to where our worlds pretty well overlap a lot. There are a lot of parents involved in helping out with room mother activities and "Home and School", and those things, and most of these parents are also members of the church and have ties back and forth. The high school science teacher over there [Las Colinas] is also the Pathfinder [a church organization like Scouts] director here. So between the two, we are pooling resources back and forth. We'll have a drama group in the Academy come and do stuff, and they're doing a 30-hour planned famine this week, and so we've just closed down our Sabbath School stuff and we're going up there and support what they're doing. So there are a lot of formal and informal ways that both the church and school benefit from each other. We just try to work together as one entity.

Because of the close relationship of church and school, school parents saw each other frequently in both places. According to one active parent:

> One of the most common places to see other [school] parents is at church and, for instance, our children are in a thing called Pathfinders, and you see all the [school] parents because they're either in Pathfinders which is surrounded by the church, or you see them in extracurricular sports.

Discussion

Social capital was found to exist in each of the schools of this study. However, the relative amounts of social capital as measured by parent interaction, the number of other school families parents knew, and how often parents volunteered at school varied according to school context. In general, the religiously-sponsored schools enjoyed higher levels of social capital as was predicted from the theory that guided this research.

The increased social capital found in the religiously-sponsored schools was due to several characteristics of the religious communities in which the schools were embedded. In both of the private religious schools, religion provided a common bond for building a community, and it provided a time and place for sustained regular social interaction, resulting in social networks which both religious schools were able to co-opt for their own purposes.

While the basis for community at GVNHS was a set of geographical boundaries drawn primarily out of political considerations, the two religious schools existed out of the conviction of parents that their children should be educated in a school that held values consistent with their own theological persuasion. The strength of their conviction was demonstrated regularly by large tuition payments made to the private schools, despite the availability of "free" tax-supported public education and by their willingness to volunteer in service to the school.

Although the public school benefited from a general strong feeling of community, religion provided the religious schools with a strong bond in the form of a common set of values from which the community coalesced. In each private school, these common religious values united the community of various age levels into a functional community

capable of forming social capital in its various forms. Because members of the respective religious communities held the same values, it was easy for members to trust each other and within this trust to mutually share information. These common values, when translated into behavior, became the norms that were sustained within each religious community.

Religion also provided the families of the two religiously-sponsored schools with a place and time for regular social interaction capable of forming social capital. Although the public school existed in a community known for its chili cook-off and many summer cultural events, these community activities did not provide any significant degree of regular, sustained social interaction for the same community members. In marked contrast, members of the religious communities met regularly at church and at church activities often enough to get to know each other and to develop social networks capable of forming social capital.

Schools are primarily places for children to regularly interact socially with each other and with adult teachers, and they provide little space for parents to interact with each other. Furthermore, parent involvement with schools is usually temporal, lasting only as long as parents have children who attend particular schools. Therefore, parent interaction at schools is generally considered infrequent and temporary. Accordingly, none of the schools in this study were able to create many large social networks or an appreciable degree of community. Rather, the two religious schools appropriated the social networks already functioning in the church communities for their own purposes. St. Mark's, through sports and special activities, intertwined the members of the parish social networks in an effort to integrate them into a large united community. At Las Colinas,

most parents were members of Vista Grande Seventh-day Adventist Church and knew each other from church activities.

Conclusion

In this study, religion was found to be an important factor in the formation of social capital in religiously-sponsored private schools. Social capital, as measured by parent interaction, the number of school families parents knew, and how often parents volunteered at school, was found to be higher in the two religious schools than in the public school studied. Religion provided a set of common values that united the families into a community and provided a place for formal, frequent social interaction. Through worship services and other church activities, community members interacted frequently enough to sustain social networks where social capital could be formed. The religious schools were able to co-opt these social networks so that they could be utilized to form social capital which was a resource beneficial to all within the school community. This provided the religious schools greater social capital resources than were found in the public school in this study.

Educational Importance

Rather than a subject to be avoided by researchers, this study demonstrates that there is value in studying religion in education. Religion provided the values that united the religious school communities into functional communities. Religion also provided the opportunity for regular, sustained social interaction necessary to form social networks capable of producing social capital. It is this increased social capital that Coleman and Hoffer (1987) attributed to the greater student achievement found in private religious

schools over that of public schools. Religion then, has value to education, not only as a subject to be studied, but also as a mechanism for increased student achievement.

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